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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/AGS

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SUBJECT: SOCIAL DEMOCRAT ENDS COALITION WITH HAIDER IN  
CARINTHIA

THIS MESSAGE IS SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 28, new Carinthian Social Democratic (SPO) leader Gabi Schaunig ended the two-year old state-level coalition with Governor Joerg Haider's BZO and called for snap elections. Schaunig accused Haider of repeatedly sabotaging agreements with her SPO, most recently over social policy. Haider initially vowed to remain in office, but later mused about holding early elections in Carinthia simultaneously with national elections due by fall 2006. The national SPO viewed the end of the BZO-SPO state coalition with relief. From the beginning, the national SPO leadership considered the unusual alliance of its state chapter with Haider's BZO an embarrassment. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Schaunig's truculent attitude toward Governor Joerg Haider was popular with her colleagues and helped propel her to the Carinthian state party chairmanship in November 2005. On February 28, following repeated turf wars with Haider over social policy legislation, Schaunig accused Haider of systematically breaking agreements and making backroom deals with the state People's Party (OVP). She terminated the coalition with Haider's Alliance Future Austria (BZO) and announced her party would move for early elections on March 9.

¶3. (SBU) In fact, BZO deputies can defeat any motion for new elections by walking out of the state legislature, ensuring the measure will fail for lack of a quorum. Haider accused Schaunig of "acting like a prima donna," speculating that she was positioning herself as a candidate for minister in a future SPO-led coalition. He initially dismissed Schaunig's call for snap elections, vowing to serve out his full term until 2009. Later, however, Haider mused about calling state elections for the same day as national polls due in fall 2006.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: It usually does not pay to take Haider's musings too seriously, but he has always been a risk taker. For him, agreeing to new state elections would likely become the political equivalent of a queen sacrifice -- giving up his governorship in a last-ditch attempt to stave off annihilation of his BZO in the federal elections. For national SPO party chairman Gusenbauer, the break-up of the SPO-BZO pact in Carinthia brings welcome relief from the embarrassment over the so-called "Chianti coalition," forged in 2004 between Haider and Schaunig's predecessor over a glass of Italian wine.

McCaw